

Introduction

In 1896, North Carolina lamented the demise of the shellfish industry in other states. In a book published almost 95 years ago, the problems associated with this decline were eloquently described:

"The consequence is the depletion of many grounds once regarded as inexhaustible, the diminution in other waters where diminution seemed impossible, followed by the assertion of local rights, attempts at the exclusion of invading trespassers, contention, bloodshed; finally legislative action and the effort to define rights by law, with power to assert and secure them by force; and all this made necessary because human nature knows no moderation in the use of the free gifts of Providence, or in the attainment of that which leads to competency or wealth.

The attempt to retrace the steps of past waste and neglect is what invariably follows in locking the stable door after the horse has gone — vain regrets and fruitless self-reproach. All the deep research of science, all the labor of planting new territory of waters, will not bring back to Connecticut, New York, Maryland and Virginia the store they wasted and the abundance they so universally squandered."

--State Board of Agriculture, 1896

The same book, however, described North Carolina's shellfish beds as "ample for all time." It described the state as the "one treasure-house not yet plundered; one great water granary whose doors are not yet thrown open."

In 1990, North Carolina's ample treasure-house is being threatened.

In the last 25 years, North Carolina's coastal area has witnessed unprecedented development. Among the reasons are the state's mild climate, beautiful beaches, fishery resources and relatively inexpensive land values. With development has come economic opportunity and, unfortunately, stress on the state's public trust resources.

More people are competing for coastal resources. Population growth in North Carolina's coastal area (20 counties as defined by the N.C. Coastal Area Management Act) averaged 9.9 percent between 1980 and 1985. This compares to a 6.4 percent growth rate statewide for the same period (Danielson 1987). Current estimates anticipate that this trend will continue.

It has been estimated that in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study area, growth between 1980 and 1990 averaged 15.5 percent. The statewide estimate for the same area and time period is 12.5 percent (APES Status and Trends 1989). The growth rate differential is even greater for some of the counties that border on a coastal sound and/or the Atlantic Ocean. Carteret, Currituck and Dare counties are among the fastest growing in the state. Carteret county grew at a rate that was double the state's growth rate during the 1970s, and is now experiencing growth at approximately two and one half times the state's current rate (Armington 1989).

Permits and licenses for development and use of natural resources are increasing. For example, permits for development issued under the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) increased from approximately 900 in 1981 to approximately 2,800 in 1986. Between 1986 and 1988 the total number of CAMA permits for the entire coastal area declined but the number of